

## Something in the water<sup>1</sup>

*Innocent still is your outcry, water, - W. H. Auden, Streams, 1955*

### Introduction:

Julian Eilmann, in *J. R. R. Tolkien; Romanticist and Poet*, emphasises the importance of the 'voices of the sea' in Tolkien's works. The creation of Arda 'from a divine music' demonstrates that 'the cosmos in its deepest nature is music; and creation is a poetic artwork.' (p. 397) Eilmann further notes 'the concept's proximity to the Romanticist world view according to which *a poetic stream* flows through all existence.' (my italics) (p. 397) Thus words, music and water may all flow as do streams and seas. In the *Ainulindale* the Ainur themselves are said to have felt at first 'a great unquiet' as they first heard the roaring of the sea. (*Silmarillion* p.19) However, they:

observed the winds and the air, and the matters of which Arda was made, of iron and stone and silver and gold and many substances: but of all these water they most greatly praised. And it is said by the Eldar that in water there lives yet the echo of the Music of the Ainur more than in any substance else that is in this Earth; and many of the Children of Ilúvatar hearken still unsated to the voices of the Sea, and yet know not for what they listen. (*Silmarillion* p.19)

### The Elder days: The realms of Ulmo

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<sup>1</sup> In *Food and its adulterations*, 1855, Arthur Hill Hassall attributed cholera to 'something in the water', indicating that it was a common colloquial phrase by this date, used as a way to account for some effect with no (then) visible cause. It is still used today for inexplicably frequent occurrences of good health, bad health, or any characteristic in a local population.

Ulmo is 'the Lord of Waters....next in might to Manwë.' (*Silmarillion*, p. 26) The *Valaquenta* emphasises his difference from the other Valar, not in any way setting himself against Eru or his own peers as did Melkor, but simply that 'He is alone.' (*Silmarillion*, p. 26) He takes no wife and makes no habitation for himself in Valinor, 'for he kept all Arda in thought.' (*Silmarillion*, p. 26) 'All seas, lakes, rivers, fountains and springs are in his government; so that the Elves say that the spirit of Ulmo runs in all the veins of the world.' (*Silmarillion*, p. 27)

In the beginning of days, when the Valar retreated from Middle-earth after the destruction wrought by Melkor (*Silmarillion*, p. 37) they established the Land of Aman as their refuge, although still caring for the rest of Arda.

Water boundaries mark the two outer limits of the Land of Aman, whose western shores lie upon the Encircling Sea (Ekkaia), and whose eastern shores upon the Great Sea, Belegaer. Early versions of Tolkien's world-picture mention Ulmo's 'outermost sea-halls of Ulmonan' in the outer sea (Lost Tales 1, p. 68) while the *Silmarillion* omits mention of the sea-hall, saying only that Ulmo dwells in the outer ocean, giving the governance of the inner seas to Ossë and Uinen. (*Silmarillion*, p. 40) Nevertheless his awareness of the needs of elves and human, and his messages of comfort to them, flow through all the waters of Arda.; and when need is great, Ulmo himself may take form and visit Middle-earth.

The retreat of the Valar to Aman and their construction of the defences of Valinor, the Pélóri, at once cast the Great Sea Belegaer into the role of a barrier. While the sea did not function as a barrier to the Valar, who needed no physical form to take themselves to any point upon Arda, their withdrawal sets a precedent that later comes to shape relations between Valar and Eldar; Eldar and humanity; Valar and humanity. The sea is *a geographical barrier* to the final stage of the Great Journey of the Eldar, yet also *the way that leads to Valinor* for those who complete the journey. (*Silmarillion* pp. 52-62; *Lost Tales*<sup>1</sup> pp. 133-138 + pp. 115-129) Later it becomes a greater Western barrier for the Exiles (*Silmarillion* pp. 87-8) and for the Númenóreans (*Silmarillion* p. 262), the Sundering Sea of Galadriel's lament in Lórien. (*FR* p.388-9)

Thus water as a boundary has a dual role, the potential to ensure safety by guarding, by keeping in; and the potential to repel by acting as a barrier, by keeping out. Moreover, water gives life but may also take it; it symbolises purity but is not wholly safe from defilement or abuse. While examining here the predominantly positive functions of water in Middle-earth, the subversive aspects Tolkien reveals will not be neglected.

### **The First Age<sup>2</sup>: waters kindly and subversive<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> For reasons of space this paper does not go into depth about every reference to water in the Three Great Tales, but focuses on the role of Ulmo and the Great Sea in the tale of the Valar's defeat of Morgoth.

<sup>3</sup> Note Robin Markus Auer: 'water works as the most subversive element of Tolkien's subcreation through its often corrupted and corrupting qualities, and is essential to the unfolding of the story by adding ambiguity to an underlying meta-narrative of the elements.' 'Sundering seas and watchers in the water' *Subcreating Arda* (2019, p.237)

Ulmo evidences what one would have to describe as an overwhelming personality; in one version of his meeting with Tuor, Tolkien tells us that Tuor “[when] Ulmo arose and spake to him [...] for dread came near to death, for the depth of the voice of Ulmo is of the uttermost depth: even as deep as his eyes, which are the deepest of all things.” (*Lost Tales 2* p.155) Ulmo is of godly stature and power, of a stern aspect, and noticeably rebellious against the other Valar in his continued succour of exiled elves and neglected humans. Yet he seeks, not control of the Children, but their nurture and redemption and is successful in subtly bringing matters in Middle-earth to the point at which Eärendil can journey safely to Valinor and bring that redemption about. His quality in his dealings with elves and mortals is the quality of mercy. (*Silmarillion* p.27)

This section explores two stories of Ulmo’s interventions; his messages from the sea and his personified, natural force for protection and for transcendence in the tales of Tuor and Voronwë, and of Eärendil and Elwing; the supporting immanence of the Lord of Waters helps to bring the strife with Melkor and Sauron to eucatastrophe. Through every struggle with catastrophe, the help that comes from the Great Sea comes in the person or through the prompting of Ulmo.

### **Tuor, Voronwë, and the Fall of Gondolin.**

Although Ulmo is said to speak ‘to those who dwell in Middle-earth with voices that are heard only as the music of water.’ (*Silmarillion* p. 27) there are times when he intervenes more directly in the affairs of Elves and

Humans. Ulmo calls Tuor, a mortal raised by the elves after the deaths of his parents, from his solitary hiding-place in the cave of Androth, and after a long journey west partly guided by the gulls, Tuor comes at last to the margins of the Great Sea, Belegaer the Shoreless. 'It is said that he was the first of Men to reach the Great Sea, and that none, save only the Eldar, have ever felt more deeply the longing that it brings.' (*UT* p. 28)

Tuor's part in the unfolding history of Middle-earth, his role in the long-awaited intervention of Valar and Eldar that results in the capture of Morgoth and the destruction of his fortress, Angband, (*Sil* p. 252), is initiated on the shores of the Great Sea; but instead of voices whispering in the music of the waters, he meets face to face with Ulmo himself.

Watching a great wave rolling in towards him as he stands on the strand, Tuor sees that 'where it had broken there stood dark against the rising storm a living shape of great height and                    majesty.' (*UT* p. 28)

Ulmo lays upon Tuor a quest; to find the hidden elven city of Gondolin and be Ulmo's messenger to Turgon its Lord. So from the sea comes hope for all who dwell on the land: Ulmo gives Tuor a cloak of shadow as protection, and tells him that he will have a companion and guide, also from the sea, Voronwë the mariner. Voronwë of Gondolin was sent by King Turgon to seek a passage to Aman and call on the Valar for aid against Morgoth. After sailing for seven years without reaching the lands in the West, his ship attempted to return to Middle-Earth, but in a storm within sight of the coast the ship was wrecked and all save he were drowned. Voronwë was washed ashore in Nevrast, near Vinyamar, where

Tuor had spoken with Ulmo. He led Tuor to Gondolin. (*Silmarillion* pp. 239-241)

When these two are brought together, and reach Gondolin—‘by the power that Ulmo set on them’ (*UT* p. 28) —they shape the future of Eldar and Édain. Firstly they put before Turgon their conviction that in sending them, Ulmo is fulfilling his promise that ‘the true hope of the Noldor... cometh from the sea.’ (*Silmarillion* p.125) Turgon is reluctant to accept this, since he ‘trusted still in [Gondolin’s] secret and impregnable strength.’ (*Silmarillion* p. 240) He shuts Gondolin off even more from the outside world, forbidding his people ever to leave their refuge in the mountains. But the power of Ulmo has already set in motion the events that will eventually bring the Valar to the aid of Middle-earth; Tuor remains in Gondolin and after seven years he marries Idril, Turgon’s daughter. It will be their son Eärendil whose mighty voyage across the Great Sea brings the host of the Valar to Middle-earth to overthrow Morgoth. (*Silmarillion* p. 241) Though Gondolin falls, as do all the hidden elven Kingdoms of the First Age, Ulmo’s plan is working its way in secret.

### **Earendil and Elwing; from the waters to salvation**

Tolkien has delineated in Middle-earth a place where two kindreds live, by the will of Eru who caused them to awaken in the far east of the continent; first the Eldar (*Lost Tales 1* p. 113) and then the Followers, humanity. (*Silmarillion* p.103) Through the course of the legendarium, he shows instances of close friendship between elves and humans, as well as

some antagonism and dislike. He also includes marriages between elf and human, placing them at vital turning-points in the history of Middle-earth. They help to bring about the victories that assuage and mitigate 'the long defeat.' (*FR* p. 372) There are only three such marriages: between Beren and Lúthien; Tuor and Idril; and Aragorn and Arwen. The children of these marriages are known as the Half-Elven.

After Gondolin and Doriath fell, Eärendil the son of Tuor and Idril became lord of the remnant of peoples who had gathered at the mouths of Sirion. He married Elwing, daughter of Dior, son of Beren and Lúthien and their children were Elros and Elrond.

Eärendil longed for the sea, for two reasons: firstly that his parents Tuor and Idril had sailed to the west, and he hoped to find them again; secondly 'he thought to find perhaps the last shore, and bring ere he died the message of Elves and Men to the Valar in the West, that should move their hearts to pity for the sorrows of Middle-earth.' (*Silmarillion* p. 246) With the help of Cirdan the Shipwright, Eärendil built the ship *Vingilot* and set sail in hope of reaching Valinor. During his absence at sea the surviving sons of Fëanor attempted to claim back for themselves the Silmaril worn by Elwing, that was retrieved by Beren and Lúthien from the crown of Morgoth. 'Elwing with the Silmaril upon her breast had cast herself into the sea...Ulmo bore up Elwing out of the waves, and he gave her the likeness of a great white bird, and upon her breast there shone as a star the Silmaril, as she flew over the water to seek Eärendil her beloved.' (*Silmarillion* p. 247)

After their reunion aboard *Vingilot* the two sail west, and fulfil the prophecy of Gwindor that one day a messenger from Middle-earth will reach the shores of Valinor and win the help of the Valar. (*UT* p.156) So Ulmo, the Spirit of the Sea, saves a land-dweller from the waters and speeds the quest of Earendil to across the ocean to Valinor, where he achieves a eucatastrophe for the peoples of Middle-earth by the saving power of water. (*Silmarillion* pp. 246-250)

## **The Second Age: Númenor and the ambivalent sea**

The creation of Númenor came about because of a victory, a eucatastrophe; the defeat of Morgoth by the combined force of the Valar, the Eldar and the three loyal houses of mortals. (*Silmarillion* pp. 260-262) The Valar made the great island for the 'Fathers of Men' in the midst of the Great Sea, nearer to Valinor than to Middle-earth, and granted them 'wisdom and power and life more enduring than any others of mortal race have possessed.' (*Silmarillion* p. 260)

Since the Great Sea surrounded Númenor, one of the chief pastimes, pleasure and labours of the Númenóreans was seafaring. Besides their long journeys of exploration, they 'took delight in the Sea, in swimming, in diving, or in small craft for contests of speed in rowing or sailing. The hardiest of the people were the fisherfolk.' (*UT* p. 171) But the dual nature of the sea was from the beginning a potential for trouble. To the west was an invisible barrier set by the Valar through their decree that no mortal should sail so far westward as to lose sight of the shores of Númenor. To



the east there was no restriction on the Númenóreans' voyages, and eventually they reached again the shores of Middle-earth. At first 'coming among them the Númenóreans taught them many things. Corn and wine they brought, and they instructed Men in the sowing of seed and the grinding of grain, in the hewing of wood and the shaping of stone, and in the ordering of their life, such as it might be in the lands of swift death and little bliss.' (*Silmarillion* p. 263)

In spite of their opportunities to do good in the east, the mariners were distracted by their longing for the west; 'the desire of everlasting life... grew strong upon them.' (*Silmarillion* p. 263) Then the situation was worsened by the new arising of Sauron. How did this happen?

Although the setting of Númenor in isolation from other lands and surrounded by ocean was a second attempt by the Valar to protect Eru's children from danger and disaster, it seems that the rulers of Arda did not fully comprehend the cyclical nature of mortal experience or the possibility of further apocalyptic events. Megan M. Fontenant, in her study of 'ongoing apocalypse' says that 'though ecstasy leads inevitably to apocalypse, ecstasy is simultaneously the method by which the memory of the apocalypse is purged.'<sup>4</sup> In the overthrow of Morgoth, mortal passion and ecstasy helped to create the apocalyptic victory, but also contributed to their sense of greatness, and the gradual forgetting of their own stature in the hierarchy of Arda: Valar; Eldar; Edain. In setting the Edain in the midst of the sea, the Valar seem to have assumed that they would

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<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of the pattern of recurrent catastrophe/eucatastrophe see Fontenot, *TS* XVI, (91-109)

thereafter lead lives of contentment and joy, and be protected from temptation or assault. But Númenor was not a playpen; its people ‘increased in stature both of mind and body.’ (*Silmarillion* p. 262) They therefore sought occupation for both those aspects of their being, meaningful activity beyond the everyday works of cultivation, manufacture and crafts. They wanted somewhere to go; and the way to go was always over the sea.

At first there developed a flow from west to east of learning, friendship, teaching and support. As the Eldar came to Númenor to share those things with the Edain, so later the Edain voyaged to Middle-earth to hand on their skills and knowledge to those left behind. Yet eventually, whether they sailed west or east, they came up against difficulty. As the years of Númenor passed, the injunction about sailing only so far to the west began to rankle. And to the east, they fell gradually into the temptations of colonization, dominance and eventually cruelty instead of friendship to those who dwelt there.<sup>5</sup> There is no mention in the 1977 *Silmarillion* of Ulmo or Osse: the Númenóreans worshipped Eru Ilúvatar upon the mountain called Meneltarma (*UT* p.166) but as far as can be seen they do not feel any engagement with the lord of the sea whose element surrounds them. By the time of the second arising of Sauron (*Silmarillion* p. 267) Númenor was split between those who held that the ban on sailing west must be obeyed, and those – the larger party – who ‘grew proud and were estranged from the Eldar and the Valar’ (*Silmarillion*, 266). The situation finally tipped towards disaster in the reign of Ar-Pharazôn the golden, for

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<sup>5</sup> For commonalities between the classical ‘sea-people’ and Numenor see Williams, 2019

whom 'no less than the kingship of the world was his desire' (*RK* p. 317)  
He captured Sauron and took him to Númenor; Sauron's insidious influence led directly to the downfall. Ar-Pharazôn's fleet sailed west, 'broke the ban of the Valar, and sailed into forbidden seas.' (*Silmarillion* p.278)

No Valar or Maia is involved in the Akallabeth, the downfall of Numenor; not even Ulmo Lord of Waters. For when 'Ar-Pharazôn on set foot upon the shores of Aman the Blessed, the Valar laid down their Guardianship and called upon the One, and the world was changed.' (*RK* p. 317) Water, no longer either a barrier or an opportunity, becomes the death of Númenor:

Númenor went down into the sea, with all its children and its wives and its maidens and its ladies proud; and all its gardens and its balls and its towers, its tombs and its riches, and its jewels and its webs and its things painted and carven, and its lore: they vanished for ever. And last of all the mounting wave, green and cold and plumed with foam, climbing over the land, took to its bosom Tar-Míriel the Queen. (*Silmarillion* p. 279)

Only the remnant of the faithful survived, carried east by 'waves like unto mountains moving with great caps of writhen snow...and after many days cast...away upon the shores of Middle-earth.' (*Silmarillion* p. 280) After the disaster of the Exile and the wars with Morgoth, comes the disaster of Numenor.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Reflecting on the Akallabeth: 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.' Or perhaps even angel-like beings with foresight may still battle illogically against 'the long defeat.' No being of any race, Valar, Eldar, or Édain seems to have learned from previous experience that bringing the Children of Ilúvatar west to protect them from disaster brings with it the inevitability of further disaster. That events can and will turn against the Children and cannot permanently be turned into happier courses. Not even Ulmo, who opposed the Great Journey west

A parallel pattern of eucatastrophe develops along with these repeated disasters; and all come from the sea. First the promise of the hope of the Eldar is fulfilled when Eärendil's petition for help is accepted and the Valar overcome Morgoth. (*Silmarillion* p. 251ff) Secondly, the survival of the Faithful and their subsequent rule of the Kingdoms of Arnor and Gondor in Middle-earth reversed for many generations the pattern whereby so much 'passed from the high and the beautiful to darkness and ruin.' (*Silmarillion* p. 255) And in the Third Age, the last hope of Gondor, too, appears from the sea. (*RK* p. 123)

## **The Third age: Foul and Fair waters<sup>7</sup>**

### **Dark, damp and barrels: the watery journey of Bilbo Baggins**

On his journey to the East with Thorin's troop of Dwarves, that 'very nice well-spoken gentlehobbit' (*FR* p.30) Bilbo Baggins finds himself crossing and travelling upon water almost as much as on or under the land. Since his

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of the Eldar, seems to have argued against the creation and peopling of Númenor; although the instantaneous decision of the Valar to hand over to Eru the responsibility for action when the ban is broken does suggest that they perceived themselves as mistaken. Eru Ilúvatar has no resource but destruction by way of 'mending' what has been broken. Had Ulmo arisen in wrath from his cherished seas and splashed angrily up Taniquetil to shout 'I told you so!' he would have achieved nothing. The 'whole marvellous, intricate structure has been reared to be destroyed.' 1956-7 *Hudson Review* IX no 10: Douglass Parker; 'Hwaet we Holbytla' p.602 (Quoted in: Flieger, 'Listening to the music' *The great tales never end* Ovenden & McIlwaine (2022))

<sup>7</sup> In exploring the narratives of the third age, this section will point out the consistent thread (or flow) of water references, imagery and incident more fully than in the earlier sections.

home is in the village of Hobbiton-Across-The-Water he must needs cross 'The Water' before he can even start his venture with Thorin and the Dwarves. (*Hobbit* p. 39) Their arrival in the Lone-lands subjects the party to torrential rain which soaks them all and 'came rushing down from the hills and mountains in the north.' (*Hobbit* p. 41) The swollen river almost drowns one pony and Fili and Kili, while sweeping away almost all the travellers' supplies of food. (*Hobbit* p. 42)

In Rivendell the company has a more positive experience of water; though the bridge is steep and slender, the southern arm of Bruinen is 'Flowing fast and noisily' beneath it in welcome, and the bridge leads to rest, comfort and advice. (*Hobbit* pp. 61-64) But worse awaits them in the storm of thunder, lightning, wind and rain that meets them in the Misty Mountains. Worse especially for Bilbo, after his separation from his companions in their escape from the goblins leaves him lost in the dark: 'When Bilbo opened his eyes, he wondered if he had.' (*Hobbit* p. 79) Alone and descending a tunnel that 'seemed to have no end.' (*Hobbit* p. 81), this previously untravelled gentlehobbit trots suddenly into icy cold waters in a 'deep, dark, subterranean lake.' (*Hobbit* p. 81) Tolkien emphasises here Bilbo's inability to swim and his fear of slimy things that may be living in the dark waters. Slime and darkness are also associated with Gollum, the lurker in this lake who is somewhat equivalent to the Watcher in the Water in *The Lord of the Rings* (*FR* p. 322)) Although the Ring of Power and the riddle-game are more instrumental in this episode than the dark water in the dark cavern, all that

slimy wetness is not in any way congenial to the Hobbit, emphasising how far he has come from the comforts of home.

Bilbo and his comrades cross water again after their fiery troubles with wargs and goblins and their night in the eyries of the eagles. Their eagle guides land them right in the middle of the Great River, on the Carrock; where their cleansing bathe perhaps consolidates their sense of having come safely through great danger. (*Hobbit* p.125) But after their rest at the house of Beorn, they are off again and without Gandalf's guidance must travel east through Mirkwood. They fear the path through the forest, but Gandalf insists this is their only path: "There are no safe paths in this part of the world. Remember you are over the Edge of the Wild now, and in for all sorts of fun wherever you go." (*Hobbit* p.149)

After some days comes their next problem with water; the black stream that crosses their path through the trees. Beorn has warned them of its enchantments, so their main concern is how to cross it 'without wetting themselves in its water.' (*Hobbit* p.153) Their relief at finding a boat is overturned by the passing of the deer, and Bombur's subsequent immersion that sends him into an enchanted sleep. This stage of the journey goes from bad to very bad indeed and culminates in their imprisonment by the Wood-elves and Bilbo's spell of hungry invisibility. (*Hobbit* p.183 ff) Yet just as water led them astray, water will bring them back to their goal. Thirteen dwarves in barrels and one barrel-riding hobbit escape down the Forest River to the shores of the Long Lake and the piles of Laketown, where they receive a warm welcome, boats, horses and ponies and 'many provisions.'

(*Hobbit* p. 213) They make their way toward the mountain by water, up the length of the Long Lake and into the River Running, by which time 'They were come to the desolation of the Dragon, and they were come at the waning of the year.' (*Hobbit* p. 216)

Water does not feature again in the tale until after the hurried descent of the companions into Smaug's lair, where they linger gloating over their treasure in the absence of Smaug. (*Hobbit* p. 252) Reminded by Bilbo that they need to find a safe way out, the party clambers up innumerable stairs, and along passages and hallways until 'a sound of water fell upon their ears, and the grey light grew suddenly more full.' (*Hobbit* p.253) The water seems almost to help them find their way out as it runs through a dwarven channel beside a wide stone-paved road to the Front Gate, where it 'fell noisily outward and foamed down towards the valley.' (*Hobbit* p. 254) This water from under the Mountain is the source of the River Running and in former times that river linked in trade and friendship the three communities of Erebor, Dale and possibly the older town found in ruins near the Laketown (Esgaroth) beside the later town that Bilbo visited. (*Hobbit* pp. 201-213)

This river of communication and neighborliness soon changes into a symbol of greed, isolationism and conflict. The dwarves build a wall, 'of squared stones laid dry, but very thick and high, across the opening' of the Front Gate, leaving only 'a small low arch' for the escape of the stream. (*Hobbit* p. 272) Although Smaug by this time lies dead in the waters near Laketown (*Hobbit* p. 262), Thorin's sudden outbreak of possessive greed and his desire to hold on to everything that once belonged to the dwarven

Kingdom is symbolized by the narrowing of the spring and its forced conversion into a wide pool that forms an extra barrier to the gate. (*Hobbit* p. 272)

Bilbo's next watery event comes after the death of Thorin: 'he went by himself, and sat alone wrapped in a blanket, and...wept until his eyes were red and his voice was hoarse.' (*Hobbit* p.301)

After all this, it is perhaps not surprising that Bilbo and Gandalf take the northern route home, away from previous watery impediments, although they recross some familiar waters before reaching the Shire: at Rivendell they are led across the Bruinen by the elves, to rest in the House of Elrond as they did on their journey east. (*Hobbit* p. 309) Then after leaving Rivendell they cross the ford further down the Bruinen (*Hobbit* pp. 311-12) and eventually 'they crossed the Bridge [over The Water] and passed the mill by the river and came right back to Bilbo's own door.' (*Hobbit* p. 313)

**'There was never much to tell of him, till he was drowned.'**

The first mention of a water-related incident in *The Lord of the Rings* appears on the second page of the narrative of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, in a discussion at The Ivy Bush Inn. (*FR* p. 30). This early reference to the power of water relates to the deaths of Drogo and Primula Baggins, the parents of Bilbo Baggins, who drowned in the Brandywine River when Frodo was a child. The conversation is far from amiable, and distinctly narrow-minded, particularly with regard to the



general unpleasantness of water and also in its revelation of divisiveness among the different groups of Hobbits both present and distant. Daddy Twofoot and Gaffer Gamgee both agree about the oddness of the hobbits of Buckland, living on 'the wrong side' of the river and '[fooling] about with boats.' (*FR* p. 30). Even these two respectable old hobbits see the drowning incident as the kind of thing that is bound to happen to anyone living away on the edge of things, over the natural boundary of the Shire formed by the Brandywine, and too close to the Old Forest. Sandyman the Miller pushes towards *schadenfreude* in his eager assertion that Drogo's and Primula's deaths were in fact two murders; 'she pushed him in, and he pulled her in after him.' (*FR* p. 31) This unpleasant suggestion is frowned upon, and the majority view is that it is water itself that is dangerous.<sup>8</sup>

In the next chapter, after the excitements of the long-expected birthday party of Bilbo and Frodo, the perils of water are discussed again; this time by Frodo and Gandalf in Frodo's study. Frodo has just experienced the inability of fire to damage the Ring. Gandalf explains how the Ring has come down the years to Bilbo and thence to Frodo, that after Isildur cut the Ring from Sauron's hand, 'the Ring was lost. It fell into the Great River, Anduin<sup>9</sup>, and vanished. For Isildur was marching north along the east banks of the River, and near the Gladden Fields he was waylaid by the Orcs of the Mountains, and almost all his folk were slain. He leaped into the waters, but the Ring

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<sup>8</sup> See Tolkien's statement on page 9 of the preface to *The adventures of Tom Bombadil* (1962): 'The thought of the Sea was ever-present in the background of hobbit imagination; but fear of it and distrust of all Elvish lore, was the prevailing mood in the Shire at the end of the Third Age.'

<sup>9</sup> Here the Great River is named as Anduin for the first time in the hobbit tales.

slipped from his finger as he swam, and then the Orcs saw him and killed him with arrows.' Gandalf paused. 'And there in the dark pools amid the Gladden Fields,' he said, 'the Ring passed out of knowledge and legend; and even so much of its history is known now only to a few, and the Council of the Wise could discover no more.' (*FR* p. 61) This tale is new to Frodo, as are the origins of Gollum in a settlement of early folk 'of hobbit-kind' who loved water and who swam and boated on it. (*FR* p. 62) There Sméagol, later Gollum, murdered his friend Déagol for the bright ring that Déagol found at the bottom of the river. Water had been unable to purify Sauron's Ring, and by it Sméagol is changed, putting 'his knowledge to crooked and malicious uses.' (*FR* p. 63) When his family casts him out, Gollum journeys up the River and eventually worms his way into the heart of the mountains by way of a 'dark stream.' (*FR* p. 63)

A happier experience of water comes at Crickhollow when Frodo, Pippin and Sam enjoy baths, a bathing song, and a good deal of splashing. (*FR* pp. 111-112) This is the first of several periods of rest through the long tale of their 'adventure' that leads to experiences of pain and horror that they could not have imagined. On the whole it is during the pleasant interludes that water serves as consolation and rest.

The Withywindle, making its way 'lazily' through the Old Forest, is 'a dark river of brown water' surrounded by willows and dominated by the oldest and most evil of them, Old Man Willow. (*FR* p.126) The hobbits are beguiled by this tree to lie down and sleep, close to the water, by its singing softly to them. Frodo is immersed in the stream and rescued with difficulty by Sam

(*FR* p. 128) but neither he nor Sam can rescue Merry and Pippin from the grasp of Old Man Willow; it is thanks to Tom Bombadil that they all escape. Notably, as he leads them out from under the trees, the nature of the river changes; 'they caught the white glimmer of foam, where the river flowed over a short fall.' (*FR* p.132) As they climb the hill to Bombadil's house 'The river, now small and swift, was leaping merrily down to meet them, glinting here and there in the light of the stars.' (*FR* p.133) <sup>10</sup>

As they draw closer to their next refuge with Bombadil and Goldberry they hear for the first time the voice of Goldberry as 'another clear voice, as young and as ancient as Spring, like the song of a glad water flowing down into the night from a bright morning, came falling like silver to meet them.' (*FR* p.133) Inside the house, the hobbits are still surrounded by images of water; Goldberry's hair 'rippled' like a stream and 'about her feet in wide vessels...white water-lilies were floating, so that she seemed to be enthroned in the midst of a pool.' She assures the visitors that they need not fear anything while in that house, mentioning, among other potential fears, 'deep water.' (*FR* p.134)

Overcome, Frodo sings an extempore song that responds to Goldberry's welcome:

O slender as a willow-wand! O clearer than clear water!  
O reed by the living pool! Fair River-daughter!  
O spring-time and summer-time, and spring again after!  
O wind on the waterfall, and the leaves' laughter!

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<sup>10</sup> This theme of change in an upriver journey is echoed in Hillman et al, 2018, 'Do Eldar dream of immortal sheep' *A wilderness of Dragons*, (p. 139, Note 12): 'The journey of the hobbits up the Withywindle-i.e. against its flow-may be seen metaphorically...to step from their present into myth...'

Almost everything that has distressed and frightened the hobbits on the path beside the Withywindle and at the foot of Old Man Willow, appears in Frodo's song in a positive aspect as elements in Goldberry's nature; willow, clear water, living pool, waterfall. (*FR* p.135) What was evil outside is homely inside, and in an echo of the hobbits' bathing at Crickhollow they are first led to water for washing then to their meal. Here, the water they drink seems clear and cold, but 'went to their hearts like wine and set free their voices.' And when Goldberry leaves the room: 'The sound of her footsteps was like a stream falling gently away downhill over cool stones in the quiet of night.' (*FR* p.136)

Wateriness continues into the hobbits' talk with Bombadil; his songs are all about his meeting with Goldberry by the pool, how he gathers lilies for her and how he will not go down to that part of the river in winter, 'not till the merry spring, when the River-daughter, dances down the withy-path to bathe in the water.' (*FR* p.137) This close identification of Goldberry with water continues the next morning when she sings her rain-song; 'the tale of a river from the spring in the highlands to the Sea far below.' Bombadil explains this as he settles down with the hobbits for a day of rest. 'This is Goldberry's washing day...and her autumn cleaning.' (*FR* p.140) The ending of the rain and return of Goldberry seem one and the same. (*FR* p.142) Tom's evening clothes and Goldberry's shoes 'like fishes mail' continue the water theme into the second evening, and Goldberry sings 'songs that began merrily in the hills and fell down softly into silence: and in the silences they

saw in their minds pools and water wider than any they had known.' (*FR* p.143)

In the Midgewater Marshes the hobbits and their new companion Strider, making for Rivendell from Bree, find instead of cool streams, clean pools and cleansing rain, the 'ground now became damp, and in places boggy...as they went on their passage became slower and more dangerous...there was no permanent trail even for Rangers to find through their shifting quagmires. Add to this the torment of flies and midges, and 'abominable creatures haunting the reeds and tussocks' and we are clearly out of Goldberry's domain. (*FR* pp.194-195) The pattern emerging is not one of safer places with water or less safe places without it; water itself, like Gollum's slimy lake beneath the mountains, may be foul as well as fair.

After Frodo is injured on Weathertop, Aragorn leads the hobbits through rough ground south of the Road for five days, but there is a river to cross; Mitheithel, which can only be crossed by the bridge that carries the road. On the bridge they find an Elfstone, a beryl, which encourages Aragorn to think that there are friendly folk about. They 'crossed the Bridge in safety, hearing no sound but the water swirling against its three great arches.' (*FR* p.213.) The next water crossing will be more perilous.

To reach Rivendell they must ford the Bruinen, but their journey is slowed by Frodo's worsening illness from the knife-wound inflicted at Weathertop. Eight days after they cross the Mitheithel, Frodo is carried by the elven horse Asfaloth towards the ford, where nine Black Riders gallop to intercept

him. Asfaloth brings Frodo safely across but the riders urge their own horses into the stream. Then Frodo is saved by the waters of Bruinen:

there came a roaring and a rushing: a noise of loud waters rolling many stones. Dimly Frodo saw the river below him rise, and down along its course there came a plumed cavalry of waves. White flames seemed to Frodo to flicker on their crests and he half fancied that he saw amid the water white riders upon white horses with frothing manes. The three Riders that were still in the midst of the Ford were overwhelmed: they disappeared, buried suddenly under angry foam. Those that were behind drew back in dismay.<sup>11</sup> (*FR* p. 227)

‘The loud-flowing Bruinen’ is a background presence during the company’s stay in Rivendell. As Frodo and his companions walk to the Council of Elrond, ‘The noise of bubbling waters came up from the foaming riverbed.’ (*FR* p.252) Later, during a silence in the Council, ‘Frodo, even in that fair house, looking out upon a sunlit valley filled with the noise of clear waters, felt a dead darkness in his heart.’ (*FR* p.280). The song and beauty of water contrast with the terrors of the tales told in the Council and their contemplation of evil and danger. Later, Elrond refers to water when seeking to comfort Boromir; ‘For there are other powers and realms you know not, and they are hidden from you. Anduin flows past many shores, ere it comes to Argonath and the Gates of Gondor.’ (*FR* p.281)

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<sup>11</sup> This (temporary) swamping of the black Riders by the water hints at the folk-motif that some beings are unable to cross water or fear crossing water; often ‘evil’ beings in traditional tales, notably witches. It is no new observation, but may reasonably be reiterated for the purposes of this paper, that encounters with water, each marking a stage forward in the adventure and experience of the protagonist, are in terms of this symbolism as significant in fantasy fiction as in folk and fairy tale. This is perhaps particularly clear in the progress of Bilbo from his tame life in the Shire to his winning of a mithril shirt of great price in the wild eastern land, but also evident in the other tales studied here.

Water next plays a noticeable part in events as the Fellowship draws near to Caradhras, where they are nearly overcome by snow. (*FR* pp. 301-307)

Long ages before, Eru Ilúvatar told Ulmo that Melkor had 'bethought him of bitter cold immoderate, and yet hath not destroyed the beauty of thy fountains, nor of thy clear pools. Behold the snow, and the cunning work of frost!' (*Silmarillion* p.19) Yet in this near-fatal battle against the snow the fellowship sense evil still at work through the manipulation of water by the bitter cold of Melkor. They are forced to retreat, and turn instead towards the doors of Moria.

There is a great deal that is disturbing about the water encountered by the Fellowship as they approach Moria, reluctantly, in hope of finding a way through the ancient halls of the dwarves. The former Gate-stream, Sirannon, has dried to 'a trickle of water...among the brown and red-stained stones of its bed.' (*FR* p.314) The stream has been dammed and in order to reach the Gate they will have to find a way around the resulting lake. Tolkien evokes a sense of fear and misgiving in his description of the lake: it is 'a dark still lake' instead of the lost 'swift and noisy stream.' The surface of the lake is 'sullen' and the water 'ominous.' Even the cliffs beyond are 'vast' 'pallid,' and 'stern.' (*FR* pp.314-5) Worse follows as the travellers reach 'a narrow creek that barred their way. It was green and stagnant, thrust out like a slimy arm towards the enclosing hills...under the weedy pools were sliding and greasy stones...Frodo shuddered with disgust at the touch of the dark unclean water on his feet.' (*FR* p.315) As they draw nearer to the Gate there comes: 'a swish, followed by a plop...ripples, black-edged with shadow in the waning

light: great rings were rippling outwards from a point far out in the lake. There was a bubbling noise and then silence. The dusk deepened, and the last gleams of the sunset were veiled in cloud.' (*FR* p.316)

During Gandalf's efforts at opening the Gates, the company displays signs of anxiety, mostly centered on the unclean water and its persistent rippling.

' 'How I hate this foul pool!' [Boromir] stooped and picking up a large stone he cast it far into the dark water.

The stone vanished with a soft slap; but at the same instant there was a swish and a bubble. Great rippling rings formed on the surface out beyond where the stone had fallen, and they moved slowly towards the foot of the cliff.

'Why did you do that, Boromir?' said Frodo. 'I hate this place, too, and...I am afraid of the pool. Don't disturb it!'" (*FR* p.321)

As the Gates open, the source of the rippling and the sense of unease is revealed. There is definitely something in the water; something large and vicious and many-tentacled, that almost captures Frodo and comes near to preventing the Fellowship's entry to Moria. Note Tolkien's use of familiar tropes of horror fiction: the lake is 'seething, as if a host of snakes were swimming up from the southern end. Out from the water a long sinuous tentacle had crawled...Its fingered end had hold of Frodo's foot, and was dragging him into the water.' (*FR* p.322)

Their escape is very narrow, as twenty more tentacles pursue them up to and almost through the door, then smash and barricade them in anger at the loss of their prey. Frodo says, 'I felt that something horrible was near from the moment that my foot first touched the water.' Gandalf believes that 'Something has crept, or has been driven out of dark waters under the mountains.' ((*FR* pp. 322-3)



Before the company see clear clean water again they suffer attack by orcs and the Balrog in Moria, and see Gandalf plummet to what must, they believe, be his death. As they say their farewells to Gandalf they see 'a torrent [that] flowed like a white lace over an endless ladder of short falls,' then 'A mere...long and oval, shaped like a great spear-head.' Gimli tells them it is 'the Mirrormere, deep Kheled-zaram!' (*FR* p. 347) Gimli begs to be allowed to look on the mere, and takes Frodo with him: Sam follows.

They stooped over the dark water. At first they could see nothing. Then slowly they saw the forms of the encircling mountains mirrored in a profound blue, and the peaks were like plumes of white flame above them; beyond there was a space of sky. There like jewels sunk in the deep shone glinting stars, though sunlight was in the sky above. Of their own stooping forms no shadow could be seen.

'O Kheled-zaram fair and wonderful!' said Gimli. 'There lies the Crown of Durin till he wakes. Farewell!' (*FR* p.348)

### **Galadriel between the waters; the silver mirror.**

The company meets more water on their way down from Mirrormere: 'a deep well of water, clear as crystal, from which a freshet fell over a stone lip and ran glistening and gurgling down a steep rocky channel.' This is the source of the Silverlode which, Aragorn explains, grows to a swift river that marks the road Gandalf had planned for their journey - toward the woods of Lorien. (*FR* p.348-9) They go on 'at a great pace' (*FR* p.349) until Frodo and Sam grow weak from their wounds got in Moria. Their resting-place between Silverlode and a tributary stream brings a reminder

of the healing virtue of *athelas*, when crushed in clean water as Aragorn did for Frodo at Weathertop. (*FR* pp.210-211)

As night falls, they come to the joining place of Silverlode with the stream Nimrodel, 'hurrying across the path before them.' Legolas speaks of the healing nature of the water and encourages the rest to cross it with him: 'One by one they climbed down and followed Legolas. For a moment Frodo stood near the brink and let the water flow over his tired feet. It was cold but its touch was clean, and as he went on and it mounted to his knees, he felt that the stain of travel and all weariness was washed from his limbs.' (*FR* p.353)<sup>12</sup>

Lórien is a forest land, and the elven folk ruled by Galadriel and Celeborn are of Silvan descent. Yet the stages of their journey into the wood are demarcated as much by water as by the increasing number of trees about them. When the travellers rest near the meeting of Nimrodel and Silverlode: 'a silence fell, and they heard the music of the waterfall running sweetly in the shadows. Almost Frodo fancied that he could hear a voice singing, mingled with the sound of the water. "Do you hear the voice of Nimrodel?" asked Legolas.' He goes on to sing the tale of Nimrodel and Amroth, each linked with both the stream and the sea. (*FR* pp.353-355)

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<sup>12</sup> Some folklore beliefs about water are evoked here, also touched on earlier in the tale; the clean touch of the water of Nimrodel contrasts directly with Frodo's feeling of the slimy water of Moria lake; contrasting clear, free water with near-stagnant brooding water. The orcs' bold fording of Nimrodel contrasts with the hesitant approach of the Black Riders to the waters of Bruinen, which sweep them away. And in a related trope, Boromir's resistance to entering a land that seems to him uncanny and perilous, echoes primary world fears of whatever beings may dwell in woods, mountains, lakes and other wild places beyond the everyday experience of mortals.

After their night with the Elves, the company sets out again deeper into Lórien; Frodo and Legolas make their farewells to Nimrodel:

‘ ‘ Farewell, sweet Nimrodel!’ cried Legolas. Frodo looked back and caught a gleam of white foam among the grey tree-stems. ‘Farewell,’ he said. It seemed to him that he would never hear again a running water so beautiful, for ever blending its innumerable notes in an endless changeful music.’ (*FR* p.360)

Continuing to follow the path along the bank of Silverlode, called Celebrant by the Elves, the Fellowship crosses the water by a bridge of two ropes, in order to reach the Naith of Lorien and eventually the City of Caras Galadhon. ‘Celebrant is already a strong stream here, as you see,’ said Haldir ‘and it runs both swift and deep, and is very cold. We do not set foot in it so far north, unless we must.’ (*FR* p.361) Here again water provides a barrier against evil incursion, yet Haldir tells Legolas; ‘We live now upon an island amid many perils...The rivers long defended us, but they are a sure guard no more for the Shadow has crept northward all about us.’ (*FR* p.363)

Nevertheless, Lórien remains sheltered on two sides; by the clean flowing waters of Anduin and Silverlode. And the encounter between Galadriel, Frodo and Sam reveals the close association of Galadriel’s power and wisdom with water; ‘the silver stream that issued from the fountain on the hill. At the bottom, upon a low pedestal carved like a branching tree, stood a basin of silver, wide and shallow, and beside it stood a silver ewer. With water from the stream Galadriel filled the basin to the brim, and breathed on it.’ (*FR* pp376-7)

The repeated yet never redundant use of the word 'silver' throughout this episode reminds us that silver, like water, is strongly present in Tolkien's imagination and writing; he associates it with water, with the moon, with music, with significant protective and nurturing figures like Galadriel and Goldberry. (*FR* p134; pp376-7). He conceived the untarnishing *mithril*, dug by the Dwarves and cherished by the Elves above gold. Its name translates as *truesilver*, which hints also at loyalty and honesty. This deepens its association with the elves, the Firstborn of Iluvatar and the children of Tolkien's heart. Galadriel stands, at this point in the quest of the Ring, between despair and transcendence, catastrophe and eucatastrophe in Middle-earth; and she stands so, almost completely surrounded by running water. One source of strength in the repudiation by Galadriel of her vision of power is her own protection by the silver waters that surround her home. Note that as she and the two hobbits leave the enclosed garden of the mirror, Galadriel says 'In the morning you must depart, for now we have chosen, and the tides of fate are flowing.' (*FR* p.381) Fate itself moves like water.

The farewell meeting of the fellowship with the elves of Lorien takes place between the waters of Silverlode and Anduin, where the two join. Galadriel's gift to Frodo emphasises the link between silver, light and water, establishing a graduated ring of protection and enclosure. At the heart of the crystal phial 'is caught the light of Eärendil's star, which is in turn 'set amid the waters of my fountain.' (*FR* p.393) Those waters are set in the silver bowl, which is set in the heart of the green bowl of the hollow within Galadriel's enclosed garden, itself set within its high green hedge.

(*FR* p.376) The hedged garden is set within the borders of Lorien, which is set between the waters of the two rivers. This resembles the fairy-tale trope of the giant's heart, within the egg of a bird, within a nest in a tree, within a huge forest; and emphasises water as a defence and a boundary.

Departing Lórien, the fellowship journeys on the waters of Anduin. The practical reason for this in narrative terms is that it delays for some time the need for the group to decide whether to turn west to Minas Tirith or east to Mordor. Deeper reasons are the fact that the river flows past Lórien and sweeps its enchanted shore; and that all waters are the waters of Ulmo. Though the hobbits are dubious about handling boats, the power of water itself is more protective than they know.

'So the Company went on their way, down the wide hurrying waters, borne ever southwards....they floated on, guiding their boats under the overhanging shadows of the western woods.' (*FR* p.395) Their clinging to the western shore emphasises the function of Anduin as a barrier and boundary between the western and eastern lands. Even the shadows of the western trees provide some sense of security. As they travel south the East/West separation is further underlined by the description of the 'Brown Lands' south of Mirkwood, 'vast and desolate' while on the western bank there are 'many places green with wide plains of grass.' (*FR* p.396) However, Aragorn brings disquiet to by revealing that Anduin is not an infallible barrier; 'Anduin is wide, yet the orcs can shoot their arrows far across the stream.' (*FR* p.497) Later it becomes clear that Gollum is following the company, floating down the river like a 'log with eyes.' (*FR* p.398) One night he comes face to face with Frodo but retreats into the

water at the sight of *Sting*. (*FR* p.400) Anduin is an open highway, a natural feature accessible to all. And the ambivalence of the power of water is demonstrated by the close encounter with the rapids of Sarn Gebir, its racing water and sharp rocks. This lays them open to attack from the east bank, by orc-arrows and by fear of the first Nazgul to appear near the river, its cry chilling their hearts. (*FR* p.404) After passing down the portage way beside the river, a new phase of their water journey begins.

It is upon the water that Aragorn son of Arathorn is reborn from the Ranger Strider, carried by the power of the river but 'guiding the boat with skilful strokes.' (*FR* p.409) After passing through the Gates of Argonath, however, Aragorn must turn again to his duty as leader of the Company, though his 'heart yearns for Minas Anor and the walls of [his] own city.' (*FR* p.409) The company must decide who will turn East and who West. Aragorn leads them to the Western bank, to the lawn of Parth Galen, and hopes 'that no evil has yet come here.' But before the night has passed, he and Frodo see from the light of Sting's blade that enemies are close. 'But maybe they are not on this side of the River.' Aragorn's hopeful words presage a day of grief, by the waters of Anduin. (*FR* p.411) Tolkien emphasises the fair and peaceful appearance of their campground, nurtured by water. The lawn 'ran down to the water' of Anduin and 'A little spring fell tumbling down and fed the grass.' (*FR* p.411) But morning confirms Anduin is not a secure boundary: 'The day came like fire and smoke.' (*FR* p.411)

As they discuss whether to travel west to Gondor or east to 'the Fear and the Shadow' (*FR* p.412) or break the Fellowship and disperse to different ways, all is accompanied by the 'voice of Rauros...a mighty roaring mingled with a deep throbbing boom.' (*FR* p.413) The altercation between Frodo and Boromir plays out to that background, but the sound of Ulmo's waters does not protect Boromir from the malign influence of Barad-Dûr. Frodo on the Seat of Seeing can view Anduin, Rauros and Ethir Anduin, but his main impression is of the signs of war, not the consolations of water. (*FR* pp.416-418) The next mention of water comes when the narrative returns to the rest of the company, who 'remained long by the riverside.' (*FR* p.418) Here too there seems little inspiration from the water; 'Why cannot we decide?' says Legolas. (*FR* p.418) When this impasse is broken by the attack of the orcs and the scattering of the Fellowship begins, only Sam understands where Frodo has chosen to go, and races to join him regardless of his own dislike of water and his knowledge that to cross that water to the east is to go deeper into danger. Deeper in another respect, as 'With a cry and a splash he fell face downward into deep swift water. Gurgling he went under, and the River closed over his curly head.' (*FR* p.422) This near-baptismal experience for Sam marks the importance of the turning-point he and Frodo are passing through. Anduin marks their true acceptance of the quest of the ring, in Sam's submersion in the river - emblematic of his submersion of himself in Frodo's need - along with their joint resolution to cross to the east. Anduin has been a throughfare and a boundary, now it becomes part-barrier and part-route for the two hobbits as they 'drive the boat eastward towards the

far shore' then 'set off seeking a path that would bring them...down into the Land of Shadow.' (*FR* p.423)

### **Waters East and West**

With the breaking of the Fellowship at the end of *The Two Towers*, Anduin becomes to the dispersed fellowship a boundary between their two parties, no longer a shared way of travel. It sinks gradually further behind the travellers as Frodo, Sam, and soon Gollum, move into the east while the three hunters, Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas, move away to the west.

Before quitting the western shore, Aragorn's party ventures again onto the waters of Anduin; they 'laid Boromir in the middle of the boat that was to bear him away.' (*TT* p.19) Having arrayed him for his last journey, they draw his boat out and cast it loose from their own. 'Boromir lay, restful, peaceful, gliding upon the bosom of the flowing water.' (*TT* p.19) When the funeral boat has vanished over Rauros Falls, each of the three sings a verse in Boromir's memory; 'But in Gondor in after-days it long was said that the elven-boat rode the fall and the foaming pools and bore him down through Osgiliath, and past the many mouths of Anduin, out into the Great Sea at night under the stars.' (*TT* p.21)

Water runs beside them as they set off, also running: 'a trickling stream flow[s]' through the winding valley they follow (*TT* p.23) Descending the westward slopes of the Emyr Muil to the green plains of Rohan (like a green sea), they follow a stream that 'splashed noisily down then vanished



into a deep growth of cresses and water-plants.' The hunters feel 'the sap flowing' and when Legolas breathes in, it is 'like one that drinks a great draft after long thirst in barren places.' This refreshing feeling renews their strength and determination and they hurry on, until they meet the Riders of Rohan then reach the fringes of Fangorn Forest.

Also heading west, but as prisoners not hunters, Merry and Pippin see little of water. Pippin's only drink is 'some burning liquid' with 'a fierce hot glow.' (*TT* p.51) This is forced down his throat by Ugluk, chief of the Isengard orcs. The hobbits' first sight of clean water comes 'by the banks of a swift narrow river' while the orcs are quarreling. (*TT* p.54) Describing the flight of the orcs along the river, pursued by the Riders, Tolkien references the destructive power of water: 'still far behind but gaining on the Orcs, gaining on them like a tide over the flats on folk straying in a quicksand.' (*TT* p.56) By contrast, Merry and Pippins' escape to safety lands them by the bank of the river, 'gurgling away in the black shadows under its deep bank.' (*TT* p.61) The river gives them water to drink and a route to follow away from the Orcs. (*TT* pp.61-2)

As they walk along the bank, following the river upstream, they repeat the trajectory of their journey beside the Forest River; they find the atmosphere under the trees stifling, they climb down a large root to drink from the stream, and sit dangling their feet into the water. They become aware of light ahead and climb toward it over rising ground, although this climb lacks the waterside path that led to Bombadil's house. Once again they are climbing towards a haven and towards new companions; and into

danger, just as in the distant Old Forest by The Shire. (*TT* pp.64-6). When they meet their new, 'extraordinary' companion, water imagery describes the impression Treebeard makes upon the hobbits. Pippin describes the experience of looking into the eyes of the ancient Ent: 'One felt as if there was an enormous well behind them, filled up with ages of memory and long, slow, steady thinking; but their surface was sparkling with the present: like sun shimmering on the outer leaves of a vast tree, or on the ripples of a very deep lake.' (*TT* p.66)

When Treebeard arrives at the foot of the mountain with his two passengers, there is a further echo of the arrival at Bombadil's house as 'the young Entwash, leaping from its springs high above, ran noisily from step to step to meet them.' (*TT* p.72) Even the stars are described in a watery manner, 'shining already in lakes between shores of cloud.' (*TT*, 73) When the travellers pass within the Ent's home, the hobbits see that 'A little stream escaped from the springs above, and leaving the main water, fell tinkling down the sheer face of the wall, pouring in silver drops, like a fine curtain in front of the arched bay. The water was gathered again into a stone basin in the floor between the trees, and thence it spilled and flowed away beside the open path, out to rejoin the Entwash in its journey through the forest.' (*TT* p.73) Treebeard mentions that part of the name of his house might be Wellinghall and takes a shower under the rain of the falling spring before the ceremonial sharing of the Ent draughts; which taste very like the waters of the Entwash, but with an added smell and taste the hobbits do not recognise. Finally, while the hobbits lie down to

sleep, Treebeard stands upright under the falling spring. (*TT* p.81) During Entmoot Merry and Pippin spend a quiet time near 'a little glittering fountain' which provides each with 'a clean, cold, sharp draught' of water. (*TT* p.85) When they spend that night with their new friend Bregalad, 'there was water (as in all ent-houses), a spring bubbling out from the bank.' (*TT* p.86)

The journey of the three hunters also follows upstream along the Entwash. (*TT* p.96) After their meeting with Gandalf, and the summoning of Shadowfax and the other horses, they cross the river at a point chosen by Shadowfax and thereafter 'rode on through the meads and riverlands. Often the grass was so high...their steeds seemed to be swimming in a grey-green sea. They came upon many hidden pools, and broad acres of sedge waving above wet and treacherous bogs; but Shadowfax found the way.' (*TT* p.109) When the four travellers come to Edoras, references to water again thread through the text. They see that 'about its feet [the green hill of Edoras] there flowed, as a thread of silver, the stream that issued from the dale.' (*TT* p.110) As they reach the stream and cross the ford, they note; 'The land was green: in the wet meads and along the grassy borders of the stream grew many willow-trees.' This recalls the Withywindle far to the north, further linking the threads of the presence of water in the narrative. (*TT* p.111) The threading continues as the travellers approach Meduseld: 'Beside the way in a stone channel a stream of clear water flowed, sparkling and chattering. At length they came to the crown of the hill. There stood a high platform above a green terrace, at the

foot of which a bright spring gushed from a stone carved in the likeness of a horse's head; beneath was a wide basin from which the water spilled and fed the falling stream.' (*TT* p.124) This well is the source of the water later used to 'wash clean the stones that Wormtongue had defiled.' (*TT* p. 125)

The next stream to feature in the tale is the Deeping Stream that passes out under the wall into the Deeping Coomb and out into Westfold Vale (*TT* p.134) During the battle of Helm's deep, the orcs 'crept like rats through the culvert through which the stream flowed out.' (*TT* p.140) After the raiders are dispatched, the culvert is blocked; the waters of the stream 'spread slowly in cold pools from cliff to cliff.' (*TT* p.141)

After the battle is won and the companies set out for Isengard, water imagery is again used in the narrative: 'The slow moon mounted, now waxing towards the full, and in its cold silver light the swelling grass-lands rose and fell like a wide grey sea.' (*TT* p.156) While the likening of the grasslands to the movement of the sea is common in literature, any such allusion in Middle-earth may be charged with the ever-present awareness of the wide grey sea that separates it from the far west.

As the travellers come to the Fords of Isen 'The riders looked down upon the crossings, and it seemed strange to them; for the Fords had ever been a place full of the rush and chatter of water upon stones; but now they were silent. The beds of the stream were almost dry, a bare waste of shingles and grey sand. 'This is become a dreary place,' said Eomer. 'What sickness has befallen the river? Many fair things Saruman has destroyed:

has he devoured the springs of Isen too?' 'So it would seem,' said Gandalf.' (*TT* p.156) Previously in the narrative groups of characters have travelled upstream in hope; the four hobbits upstream along the banks of the Withywindle and later Merry and Pippin upstream beside the Entwash, but here the travellers are beset by strangeness and fear after the battle with the orcs at Helm's Deep, the dry riverbed of Entwash, and the noise of the night-time passing of the Huorns. (*TT* p.158) The sudden 'rush of water hurrying down among the stones' (*TT* p.158) is the first sign they have that what they will find at Isengard may not be all bad. Here the action of water brings about a shift in the narrative towards hope. Saruman's tower is encircled in a new lake, and Treebeard 'has taken over the management of Isengard.' (*TT* p.162)

At Orthanc Merry and Pippin have much to relate about the strategic role of water in the taking of Isengard: 'Ents and Huorns were digging great pits and trenches, and making great pools and dams, gathering all the waters of the Isen and every other spring and stream that they could find.' (*TT* p.174) [...] 'It must have been about midnight when the Ents broke the dams and poured all the gathered waters through a gap in the northern wall, down into Isengard [which] began to fill up with black creeping streams and pools. They glittered in the last light of the Moon, as they spread over the plain... The Ents kept on pouring in more water, till all the fires were quenched and every cave filled (*TT* pp.176-7)

The waters have receded when the meeting with Saruman takes place. Gandalf asks Treebeard, 'I beg you to pour in the waters again; and do so,

until Isengard remains a standing pool, or you discover the outlets. When all the underground places are drowned, and the outlets blocked, then Saruman must stay upstairs and look out of the windows.’ (*TT* p.181)

As the travellers set out from Orthanc, Tolkien references the nearness of the river: ‘The road passed slowly, winding down the valley. Now further, and now nearer Isen flowed in its stony bed.’ (*TT* p.194) The foregrounding of the movement, sound, reflected light and nearness or distance of water is not simple description, but emphasises the importance of water to everything that happens in the tale. Water is not just something that happens to be nearby; it has within it the power of Ulmo.

When Book 4 opens, Frodo and Sam are ‘into the gloom’ on the heights of the Emyr Muil, where ‘beyond its tumbled skirts lay livid festering marshes where nothing moved and not even a bird was to be seen.’ (*TT* p.209) They are poised between fair and foul waters: ‘Far away to the right the Anduin, that had gleamed fitfully in sun-breaks during the day, was now hidden in shadow. But their eyes did not look beyond the River.’ (*TT* p.209)

The arduous journey of Frodo and Sam to Mordor and across it to Mount Doom strongly exemplifies Tolkien’s sense of water’s transcendent aspect as well as its fundamental nature as the element that supports life and health. In turning away from the now ‘far away’ Anduin the two hobbits are shouldering their new burden, turning to face the horrors of the dead marshes. From now until the end of their quest they will experience

gradually diminishing chances of finding water for drinking or keeping clean, and the defiled nature of Mordor will be revealed in both the absence of drinking water in its dry regions, and the filth of what water does survive. And even before they enter the land of shadow, water takes a hand against them as they strive to descend the cliff-face of the Emyr Muil: 'then the rain came. In a blinding sheet, mingled with hail, it drove against the cliff, bitter cold.' (*TT* p.214)

Water has created the 'great fissure that yawned suddenly black before their feet...too wide to jump across in the dim light' as they move on from the cliff, so creating another barrier to their progress. (*TT* p.218) And water running down such fissures ends only in the 'stagnant pools and mires' of the Dead Marshes. (*TT* p.227) Although Gollum finds pleasure splashing in the stream, Frodo's concern is whether 'the water here is fit to drink.' Gollum's advice is to 'drink it, while we can!' (*TT* p.229) As their journey proceeds the hobbits will come to rely on the knowledge of Gollum, a creature turned to evil, to learn how to negotiate this alien landscape. When they reach the end of the stream they have been following: 'Over the last shelf of rotting stone the stream gurgled and fell down into a brown bog and was lost.' Frodo asks 'must we cross these evil-smelling fens?' (*TT* p.232) In place of wise advice from Gandalf or Aragorn, Frodo now has only Gollum's sarcasm, and the dire knowledge that there is no safe or more pleasant way: 'Follow Smeagol very carefully, and you may go a long way, quite a long way, before He catches you, yes perhaps.' (*TT*, p.233)

Now the hobbits trail in single file behind Gollum, relying entirely on his expertise in this land of foul water:

The hobbits soon found that what had looked like one vast fen was really an endless network of pools, and soft mires. and winding half-strangled water-courses. Among these a cunning eye and foot could thread a wandering path. The only green was the scum of livid weed on the dark greasy surfaces of the sullen waters. Dead grasses and rotting reeds loomed up in the mists like ragged shadows of long-forgotten summers. (*TT* p.233)

On the third day of their slow progress through the marshes: 'Gollum looked up. A dark water was before him, and he was crawling on the ground, this way and that, doubtful of the way. 'Yes, they are all round us,' he whispered. 'The tricky lights. Candles of corpses, yes, yes. Don't you heed them! Don't look! Don't follow them! Where's the master?' (*TT* p.234) Both Sam and Frodo are shaken by the sight of the 'pale faces, deep deep under the dark water.' (*TT* p.235) Here under the close shadow of Mordor and the power of Sauron, the hobbits are utterly remote from the voice of Ulmo, 'deep as the deeps of the ocean which only he has seen.' (*Silmarillion* p.27) Here moisture serves only to created noisome filth and mud until the hobbits are 'slimed and fouled almost up to their necks and stank in one another's nostrils.' (*TT* p.236) This corruption of the natural world denatures the hobbits, pulling them down towards the degraded level of existence that Gollum endures. The final passage of the foul waters is no relief, as the marshes die 'away into dead peats and wide flats of dry cracked mud. The land ahead rose in long shallow slopes, barren and pitiless, towards the desert that lay at Sauron's gate.' (*TT* p.238) Their first fearful day spent cowering amid dust and ashes and foul smells is



followed by their realization that they cannot hope to enter Mordor through the Black Gate, but must trust themselves even further to Gollum who is at one and the same time leading them on their quest and leading them astray. There is little mention of water in these pages: a reference to the 'bitter inland sea of Nurnen' (*TT* p.244); Sam's mention that he needs a wash (*TT* p.245) with its sad echo of the happy bath times at Crickhollow and at Bombadil's house; and Gollum's regret that he never went as far as 'the Great Water that is never still' but is full of fishes: 'we never went there, alas no! ***we never had a chance.***' [my emphasis] (*TT* p.249)

As the hobbits prepare to set out again 'they ate a little, and drank sparingly. Gollum ate nothing, but he accepted water gladly. 'Soon get more now,' he said, licking his lips. 'Good water runs down in streams to the Great River, nice water in the lands we are going to.' (*TT* p.256) This sharing of water and the revelation that 'good water, nice water' means as much to Gollum as to the hobbits who have taken it for granted for most of their lives, seems almost a ritual marking a turn in their relationship as well as in their journey; and an acknowledgement of their likeness. Everything that lives needs water to survive. Sadly this sense of allegiance is destined to fail.

As they move south for two nights and a day, 'they passed into the northern marches of that land that Men once called Ithilien, a fair country of climbing woods and swift-falling streams.' (*TT* p.258) Following the downward rush of the stream, they find their spirits lifted by the water and

the beauty of the land, like Merry and Pippin after their walk upstream beside Isen:

They followed a stream that went quickly down before them. Presently it brought them to a small clear lake in a shallow dell: it lay in the broken ruins of an ancient stone basin, the carven rim of which was almost wholly covered with mosses and rose-brambles; iris-swords stood in ranks about it. and water-lily leaves floated on its dark gently-rippling surface; but it was deep and fresh, and spilled ever softly out over a stony lip at the far end. Here they washed themselves and drank their fill at the in-falling freshet. (*TT* p.259)

Evidence of enemy incursions into Ithilien prompts the travellers to seek somewhere to hide, but Sam's desire to provide something better for Frodo leads to one of the best-loved episodes of recovery and consolation in the Tale. And it all depends on water. Gollum is content with water to drink and some raw rabbit, but Sam's culinary skills require pans of boiling water on a campfire and skinned rabbit to stew. The comic exchanges between Sam and Gollum add to this sense of a brief escape from their arduous duty and extend briefly the sense of a common purpose for the three. This domestic use for water reaches back to home in the Shire, and perhaps dimly for Gollum to the banks of Anduin before the Ring came and drove him from companionship forever.

Recovery suddenly leads to change; Frodo and Sam find themselves annexed by Faramir's company, while Gollum slips away. (*TT* pp.265-6) After the foray against the Southrons and the revelation to the hobbits of Boromir's death, Faramir tells of his encounter by the waters of Anduin at night:

'Then I saw, or it seemed that I saw, a boat floating on the water, glimmering grey, a small boat of a strange fashion with a high prow. and there was none to row or steer it. An awe fell on me, for a

pale light was round it. [ I ] began to walk out into the stream... Then the boat turned towards me, and stayed its pace, and floated slowly by within my hand's reach, yet I durst not handle it. It... seemed to me as it passed under my gaze that it was almost filled with clear water, from which came the light; and lapped in the water a warrior lay asleep. It was Boromir, my brother, dead... Boromir! I cried. Where is thy horn? Whither goest thou? O Boromir! But he was gone. The boat turned into the stream and passed glimmering on into the night. Dreamlike it was. and yet no dream, for there was no waking. And I do not doubt that he is dead and has passed down the River to the Sea.'

Here the water within the boat, clear and filled with light, enshrines and hallows the heroic death of Boromir, as the water within Galadriel's phial enshrines and hallows the light of Eärendil's star. Further, the sheltering boat and the fair waters of Anduin echo the phial itself and the waters protecting Lórien. (*TT* pp.274-5)

Water dominates the narrative as the hobbits are led to Henneth Annun. Going south, they move downstream on the bank of the 'small river in a narrow gorge: it was the same stream that trickled far above out of the round pool, now grown to a swift torrent, leaping down over many stones in a deep-cloven bed, overhung with ilex and dark box-woods.' Water and the abundance of growth symbolize the healing possibilities of this time in Ithilien. The hobbits are able to look away from the east for a while: 'Looking west they could see, below them in a haze of light, lowlands and broad meads, and glinting far off in the westering sun the wide waters of the Anduin.' (*TT* p.281) Both Anduin and the setting sun speak of the far west across the Great Sea.

Once Frodo and Sam are blindfolded to secure the secret of the way into Henneth Annun, it is the sound of water that marks out for them the stages

of that short journey: 'Always the noise of the running water was on their right hand, and it grew nearer and louder.' Then:

'the noise of the stream had become faint... they were picked up and carried down, down many steps, and round a corner. Suddenly they heard the water again, loud now, rushing and splashing. All round them it seemed, and they felt a fine rain on their hands and cheeks. At last they were set on their feet once more... Then came the voice of Faramir close behind. 'Let them see!' he said. The scarves were removed and their hoods drawn back, and they blinked and gasped. They stood on a wet floor of polished stone, the doorstep, as it were, of a rough-hewn gate of rock opening dark behind them. But in front a thin veil of water was hung, so near that Frodo could have put an outstretched arm into it. It faced westward. The level shafts of the setting sun behind beat upon it, and the red light was broken into many flickering beams of ever-changing colour. It was as if they stood at the window of some elven-tower, curtained with threaded jewels of silver and gold, and ruby, sapphire and amethyst, all kindled with an unconsuming fire.

Faramir [said]: 'This is the Window of the Sunset, Henneth Annun, fairest of all the falls of Ithilien, land of many fountains. (*TT* p.282)

As darkness falls: 'The light faded from the cave door, and the grey veil of falling water grew dim and was lost in gathering shadow. Always the sound of the water went on, never changing its note, morning or evening or night. It murmured and whispered of sleep.' (*TT* p.284)

Within the cavern, water assumes a homely aspect as meal-time draws near: 'Men were fetching water from the fall. Some were laving their hands in basins. A wide copper bowl and a white cloth were brought to Faramir and he washed. 'Wake our guests,' he said, 'and take them water. It is time to eat... Sam, not used to being waited on, looked with some surprise at the tall man who bowed, holding a basin of water before him.

“Put it on the ground, master, if you please! ’ he said. ‘Easier for me and you.’ Then to the astonishment and amusement of the Men he plunged his head into the cold water and splashed his neck and ears.’ (TT p.284)

The following chapter, ‘The Forbidden Pool’ is one of the finest examples of how Tolkien’s narrative sections with an abundance of water in them are always about something else as well – good, evil, dark, light, hope, despair, life, death. (TT pp.292-302) When Faramir wakes Frodo in the night, the hobbits follow him past the curtain ‘now become a dazzling veil of silk and pearls and silver thread’ in the moonlight (TT p.292) To quote in full every reference to water, and its accompanying allusions to silver, moonlight, the far West, Anduin, whiteness and snow would be to quote the entire chapter. Firstly:

They were on a wide flat rock without rail or parapet. At their right, eastwards, the torrent fell, splashing over many terraces, and then, pouring down a steep race, it filled a smooth-hewn channel with a dark force of water flecked with foam, and curling and rushing almost at their feet as it plunged sheer over the edge that yawned upon their left. (TT p.292)

Note the emphasis here on the *dark force of water* [my italics] plunging, curling and rushing. Water here is as dangerous as the waves raised by Elrond against the Black Riders months before. Faramir takes Frodo closer to the edge of the high rock platform to show him the reason for his night wakening:

Far below them they saw the white waters pour into a foaming bowl, and then swirl darkly about a deep oval basin in the rocks. until they found their way out again through a narrow gate, and flowed away, fuming and chattering, into calmer and more level reaches. The moonlight still slanted down to the fall's foot and gleamed on the ripples of the basin. Presently Frodo was aware of a small dark thing on the near bank, but even as he looked at

it, it dived and vanished just beyond the boil and bubble of the fall, cleaving the black water as neatly as an arrow or an edgewise stone. (*TT* p.293)

Faramir asks Frodo if they should shoot the intruder, 'so secret and so sly...to come sporting in the pool before our very window.' Frodo says 'No!' He tries to explain Gollum to Faramir, who eventually asks 'What then does the creature seek? 'Fish,' said Frodo. 'Look! ' (*TT* p.294.)

'They peered down at the dark pool. A little black head appeared at the far end of the basin, just out of the deep shadow of the rocks. There was a brief silver glint, and a swirl of tiny ripples. It swam to the side, and then with marvellous agility a froglike figure climbed out of the water and up the bank. At once it sat down and began to gnaw at the small silver thing that glittered as it turned: the last rays of the moon were now falling behind the stony wall at the pool's end.

'Faramir laughed softly. 'Fish! ' he said. 'It is a less perilous hunger. Or maybe not: fish from the pool of Henneth Annûn may cost him all he has to give.' (*TT* p.294)

Frodo is now plunged into a turmoil of mixed feelings, asking Faramir to break his own rules in order to save Gollum: 'The creature is wretched and hungry,' said Frodo, 'and unaware of his danger. And Gandalf, your Mithrandir, he would have bidden you not to slay him for that reason, and for others... this creature is in some way bound up with my errand. Until you found us and took us, he was my guide.' (*TT* p.295) Faramir agrees and Anborn leads Frodo down to the pool.

'Frodo found himself on the top of the southern bank above the pool. It was now dark and the falls were pale and grey...He could not see Gollum. He...crept forward, using his hands Gollum-like to feel his way and to steady himself. The rocks were for the most part flat and smooth but slippery. He halted listening. At first he could hear no sound but the unceasing rush of the fall behind him. Then presently he heard, not far ahead, a hissing murmur.

'Fissh, nice fissh... Now we can eat fish in peace. No, not in peace, precious...nasty hobbits. Gone and left us, *gollum*; and Precious is gone. *Only poor Sméagol all alone.* [my italics]

So it went on, almost as unceasing as the waterfall, only interrupted by a faint noise of slavering and gurgling. Frodo shivered, listening with pity and disgust....one true shot and [he]would be rid of the miserable voice forever.' (TT pp.295-6)

Frodo suffers enormous conflict over his own behaviour in this scene, and not for the first time in the tale. Here 'His heart sank, This was too much like trickery...and certainly what Frodo did would seem like treachery to the poor treacherous creature.' When Anborn seizes and binds Gollum, he calls Frodo; 'Wicked! Tricky! False!' And this is hard to dispute; from Gollum's point of view he is simply and genuinely in need of fish from the nice clean pool. Frodo says miserably to Sam: 'He came to me, because he trusted me at first, I'm afraid...I hope it will be all right; but I hate the whole business.' (TT p.297) There are echoes in this incident of the scene far away on the barrow-downs when Frodo experiences 'a wild thought of escape...He wondered if he put on the

Ring, whether the Barrow-Wight would miss him...he thought of himself running free over the grass, grieving for Merry, and Sam, and Pippin, but free and alive himself.' (*FR* p.152) At each of these moments of temptation Frodo is forced to accept that he must do right by those whom he needs to fulfill his task, even Gollum whom he never expected to meet at all but to whom he is now bound.

When Gollum is brought before Faramir, he is told; 'tonight you are come where it is death to come. The fish of this pool are dearly bought.' Pathetically, out of his depth, 'Gollum dropped the fish from his hand. 'Don't want fish,' he said.' 'The price is not set on the fish,' said Faramir....What is your name? Whence do you come? And whither do you go? What is your business?'

'We are lost, lost,' said Gollum. 'No name, no business, no Precious, nothing. Only empty. Only hungry; yes, we are hungry. A few little fishes, nasty bony little fishes, for a poor creature, and they say death. So wise they are; so just, so very just.' (*TT* p.298)

The water, the pool, the fish and the interactions between characters in this chapter add up to a rich presentation of a state of impending war; espionage, skirmishes, the need of refuge and anxiety are coming to a head with the sense that full war is coming nearer by the day. Rivers and waterfalls are demarcation lines between enemies, there are death penalties for being within reach of the water, fish is unavailable to the hungry and ill-defined stray being. Deep waters indeed.



The next morning the travellers depart, and Faramir warns Frodo and Sam about fell water ahead: 'You will have no lack of water as you walk in Ithilien, but do not drink of any stream that flows from Imlad Morgul, the Valley of Living Death.' (*TT* p.303) Returned to the woodlands blindfolded, they are at once disorientated, their relationship with water and with the land having shifted: 'No noise of the falls could be heard, for a long southward slope lay now between them and the ravine in which the stream flowed. To the west they could see light through the trees, as if the world came there to a sudden end, at a brink looking out only on to sky.' (*TT* p.304) As they continue south through the trees of Ithilien, there are further changes. When they halt for a rest: 'To the left lay darkness: the towering walls of Mordor; and out of that darkness the long valley came, falling steeply in an ever-widening trough towards the Anduin. At its bottom ran a hurrying stream: Frodo could hear its stony voice coming up through the silence; and beside it on the hither side a road went winding down like a pale ribbon, down into chill grey mists that no gleam of sunset touched...the sound of the water seemed cold and cruel: the voice of Morgulduin, the polluted stream that flowed from the Valley of the Wraiths.' (*TT* p.306) This is the water that they must not drink.

The hobbits feel less at ease the further they travel; Gollum disappears and returns, there are strange noises like thunder or drumming; even Gollum says - or hisses - 'We're not in decent places.' (*TT* p.310) By the time they reach the crossroads and see the eastward road leading into darkness, they are thoroughly unnerved; then: 'Standing there for a moment filled with dread Frodo became aware that a light was shining;

he saw it glowing on Sam's face beside him. Turning towards it, he saw... far away, beyond sad Gondor now overwhelmed in shade, the Sun was sinking, finding at last the hem of the great slow-rolling pall of cloud, and *falling in an ominous fire towards the yet unsullied Sea.*' [my italics] The sun breaking free of the cloud, even though it is descending, reminds Frodo of the far west and of the Great Sea, and strengthens him, so that even as night falls he says 'They cannot conquer forever!' L(TT p.311)

Their quest takes them on the eastward road:

So they came slowly to the white bridge. Here the road, gleaming faintly, passed over the stream in the midst of the valley, and went on, winding deviously up towards the city's gate: From mead to mead the bridge sprang ...The water flowing beneath was silent, and it steamed, but the vapour that rose from it, curling and twisting about the bridge, was deadly cold. (TT p.313)

The water here is silent; steaming; vaporous; cold. Until the travellers climb some way up the side of the valley the stream poisons them; 'As they rose above the stench and vapours of the poisonous stream their breath became easier and their heads clearer; but now their limbs were deadly tired, as if they had walked all night under a burden, or had been swimming long against a heavy tide of water.' Within a few paragraphs the saving and musical grace of water is gone, replaced by negatives, dragging the travellers down. (TT p.314)

By the time they have struggled up the stairs of Cirith Ungol, Sam and Frodo are far away from their previous lives. This desperate quest could not be further removed from the long-expected birthday party or the blissful night in the safety of Bombadil's home: 'In a dark crevice between two great piers of rock they sat down: Frodo and Sam a little way within.

and Gollum crouched upon the ground near the opening.' (*TT* p.320.) In hiding within enemy territory, their attitude to water, as to food, becomes that of soldiers who need to be aware of where the next meal or drink may, or may not, be coming from:

'the hobbits took what they expected would be their last meal before they went down into the Nameless Land, maybe the last meal they would ever eat together. Some of the food of Gondor they ate, and wafers of the waybread of the Elves. and they drank a little. But of their water they were sparing and took only enough to moisten their dry mouths.

'I wonder when we'll find water again?' said Sam... 'Faramir said we were not to drink any water in Morgul.'" (*TT* p320)

Water of a pure and transcendent nature shapes the next great trial for Frodo and Sam as, abandoned by Gollum, they struggle through the tunnels of Shelob's lair. Water associated with light and with hope, whose existence Frodo has almost forgotten. Sam reminds him of the phial of Galadriel: 'The star-glass!' Frodo agrees that only light can help them, but at this point in the narrative no direct link is named between the light of Eärendil's star and the water of Galadriel's well. Nevertheless, the water is within the crystal phial and the ancient starlight lies within the water. This combination awakens Frodo's courage:

Slowly his hand went to his bosom, and slowly he held aloft the Phial of Galadriel. For a moment it glimmered, faint as a rising star struggling in heavy earthward mists, and then as its power waxed, and hope grew in Frodo's mind, it began to burn, and kindled to a silver flame, a minute heart of dazzling light, as though Eärendil had himself come down from the high sunset paths with the last Silmaril upon his brow. The darkness receded from it until it seemed to shine in the centre of a globe of airy crystal, and the hand that held it sparkled with white fire. (*TT* p.329)

Sam's last encounter with water comes shortly before Frodo is captured: 'He heard the crack of stone, and the murmur of water far off in Morgul Vale; and down away under the rock the bubbling misery of Shelob.' (*TT* p.343)

When the narrative turns back to events in the west, fairer waters soon appear. Gandalf and Pippin reach 'the fields of the Pelennor: fair and fertile townlands on the long slopes and terraces falling to the deep levels of the Anduin [that] going in a wide knee about the hills of Emyrn Arnen in South Ithilien, bent sharply west, and the out-wall rose upon its very brink; and beneath it lay the quays and landings of the Harlond for craft that came upstream from the southern fiefs.' Agriculture and trade all nurtured by fresh or salt water; while 'Prince Imrahil in his castle of Dol Amroth by the sea...was of high blood, and his folk also, tall men and proud with sea-grey eyes.' (*RK* p.22)

Water next stands as an emblem of hope and beauty, yet balanced by the sorrowful sight of the dead tree: 'A sweet fountain played...in the morning sun, and a sward of bright green lay about it; but in the midst. drooping over the pool, stood a dead tree, and the falling drops dripped sadly from its barren and broken branches back into the clear water.' (*RK* p.25) Pippin scarcely has time to understand this, before he is interrogated by Denethor, an experience that leaves him stunned. But Gandalf consoles him, and Tolkien uses water imagery again to evoke Gandalf's mood: 'in the wizard's face [Pippin] saw at first only lines of care and sorrow; though as he looked more intently he perceived that under all there was a great

joy: a fountain of mirth enough to set a kingdom laughing, were it to gush forth.' (*RK* p.31)

Befriended by Beregon, Pippin learns that the nearness of the Great Sea itself may be a double-edged sword, as it was to Númenor ages before: 'There is a great fleet drawing near to the mouths of Anduin, manned by the corsairs of Umbar in the South...this is no longer a bickering at the fords.' (*RK* p.38)

Turning next to Merry, Théoden and company, Tolkien references a folk motif of water as a meeting point and a boundary, a place where important events may be focused: 'Rohan? Rohan did you say? That is a glad word. We seek that land in haste from long afar.' 'You have found it,' said Éomer. 'When you crossed the fords yonder you entered it.'" (*RK* p.47)

Aragorn's words to the company of the dead might have brought hope to Beregon in his fear of the approaching ships: 'Now I go to Pelargir upon Anduin, and ye shall come after me. And when all this land is clean of the servants of Sauron, I will hold the oath fulfilled, and ye shall have peace and depart for ever. For I am Elessar, Isildur's heir of Gondor.' For Aragorn Elessar is literally 'hope' of standing against the invasion from the sea. (*RK* p.63)

When the tale returns to the muster of Rohan, water accompanies the Riders down from the White Mountains into Harrowdale:

All day far below them a leaping stream had run down from the high pass behind, cleaving its narrow way between pine-clad walls; and now through a stony gate it flowed out and passed into a wider vale. The Riders followed it, and suddenly Harrowdale lay before them, loud with the noise of waters in the evening. There the white Snowbourn, joined by the lesser stream, went rushing,

fuming on the stones, down to Edoras and the green hills and the plains. (*RK* p.65)

The water characterises the Kingdom and expresses the nature of its people. The mountains, the snow and the pure flowing water surround the strongholds of the Rohirrim and at this point so close to the departure for war, water stands as the boundary of home, and flows ahead as if leading the muster on its necessary journey away from home:

In the deepening dusk they came down into the valley. Here the Snowbourn flowed near to the western walls of the dale, and soon the path led them to a ford where the shallow waters murmured loudly on the stones. The ford was guarded. As the king approached many men sprang up out of the shadow of the rocks; and when they saw the king they cried with glad voices: 'Théoden King! Théoden King! The King of the Mark returns!' (*RK* p.66) The next morning 'On down the grey road they went beside the Snowbourn rushing on its stones;' (*RK* p.76)

When the story returns to the Siege of Gondor (*RK* VI, 4) and the battles that follow it both to the east and the west, the lower reaches of the Anduin, from Osgiliath to the Mouths that flow into the sea, display the varying functions of the river as boundary; as demarcation line between opposing armies; as a highway of commerce and travel in times of peace; as an access point for invaders seeking to sail upstream or cross:

'And the Enemy must pay dearly for the crossing of the River.' (*RK* p.89)

'Ill news came soon again. The passage of Anduin was won by the Enemy...They have paid dear for the crossing but less dearly than we hoped. The plan has been well laid. It is now seen that in secret they have long been building floats and barges in great numbers in East Osgiliath. They swarmed across like beetles' (*RK* p.91)

‘Far behind the battle the River had been swiftly bridged, and all day more force and gear of war had poured across.’ (RK p. 98) The river has ceased to function as a barrier to keep out or slow the invaders; for them it has become a way forward. And they have ‘poured’ across, as though they were themselves a flood.

Later, when Denethor in his madness seeks to immolate himself and Faramir, the servants carry Faramir’s bed out from the White Tower, and Denethor halts them beside the dead tree. As if in sorrow for Faramir, ‘they heard the water dripping sadly from the dead branches into the dark pool.’ (RK p.99)

The description of the ride of the Rohirrim has almost no direct reference to water, a unique event in *The Lord of the Rings*. There is an oblique hint of the sea, as Ghân-buri-Ghân departs, crying ‘Wind is changing!’ (RK p.109) Unknown to those who hear it, that cry presages the arrival of the fleet at Pelargir, and the arrival of hope from the sea, at the turning point of the battle of the Pelennor Fields:

‘In that clear air watchmen on the walls saw afar a new sight of fear, and their last hope left them. For Anduin, from the bend at the Harlond, so flowed that from the City men could look down it lengthwise for some leagues, and the far-sighted could see any ships that approached. And looking thither they cried in dismay; for black against the glittering stream they beheld a fleet borne up on the wind: dromunds, and ships of great draught with many oars, and with black sails bellying in the breeze. ‘The Corsairs of Umbar!’ men shouted. ‘The Corsairs of Umbar! Look! The Corsairs of Umbar are coming! So Belfalas is taken, and the Ethir, and Lebennin is gone. The Corsairs are upon us! It is the last stroke of doom!’ (RK p.122)

But the sea that flows from the western shore of Middle-earth to the eastern shores of Valinor has a trick up its sleeve; or perhaps up the sleeve of Ulmo?

[Éomer] looked out again on the black ships, and he lifted up his sword to defy them...And all eyes followed his gaze, and behold! upon the foremost ship a great standard broke, and the wind displayed it as she turned towards the Harlond. There flowered a White Tree, and that was for Gondor; but Seven Stars were about it, and a high crown above it, the signs of Elendil that no lord had borne for years beyond count. And the stars flamed in the sunlight, for they were wrought of gems by Arwen daughter of Elrond; and the crown was bright in the morning, for it was wrought of mithril and gold. Thus came Aragorn son of Arathorn, Elessar, Isildur's heir, out of the Paths of the Dead, borne upon a wind from the Sea to the kingdom of Gondor... The hosts of Mordor were seized with bewilderment, and a great wizardry it seemed to them that their own ships should be filled with their foes; and a black dread fell on them, knowing that the tides of fate had turned against them and their doom was at hand. (*RK* p.123)

The King from the sea soon uses water to heal his injured comrades, evoking the earlier healing of Frodo on their way to Imladris: 'Then ...he cast the leaves into the bowls of steaming water that were brought to him, and at once all hearts were lightened. For the fragrance that came to each was like a memory of dewy mornings of unshadowed sun in some land of which the fair world in Spring is itself but a fleeting memory.' (*RK* p.141)

There follows a period of relative quiet; the members of the Fellowship have time to hear each other's stories, and the captains' last debate establishes their plans for the assault on Mordor. Tolkien continually reminds the reader of the abiding presence of Anduin and the sea., as here where Legolas, Gimli, Merry and Pippin's meeting is described as 'merry.'



They went and sat upon the wall with the greensward of the Houses of Healing behind them; and away southward before them was the Anduin glittering in the sun, as it flowed away...into the wide flats and green haze of Lebennin and South Ithilien. And now Legolas fell silent...and as he gazed he saw white sea-birds beating up the River. 'Look!' he cried. 'Gulls! They are flying far inland. A wonder they are to me and a trouble to my heart. Never in all my life had I met them, until we came to Pelargir, and there I heard them crying in the air as we rode to the battle of the ships. Then I stood still...for their wailing voices spoke to me of the Sea. The Sea! Alas! I have not yet beheld it. But deep in the hearts of all my kindred lies the sea-longing, which it is perilous to stir. Alas! for the gulls. No peace shall I have again under beech or under elm.' (RK p.149)

Gimli emphasises the importance of Aragorn's role in the defeat of Umbar, developing the links between Aragorn and the sea, and with Isildur and Elendil that will culminate at his coronation: 'But mighty indeed was Aragorn that day. Lo! all the black fleet was in his hands; and he chose the greatest ship to be his own, and he went up into it.' (RK, p.152)

'The oars were now wielded by free men, and manfully they laboured; yet slowly we passed up the Great River, for we strove against its stream, and though that is not swift down in the South, we had no help of wind.' For the third time in the tale members of the Fellowship are striving upstream towards hope; and they again succeed in finding it. 'At midnight hope was indeed born anew. Sea-crafty men of the Ethir gazing southward spoke of a change coming with a fresh wind from the Sea. Long ere day the masted ships hoisted sail; and our speed grew, until dawn whitened the foam at our prows. And so it was, as you know, that we came in the third hour of the morning with a fair wind and the Sun unveiled, and we unfurled the great standard in battle. (RK p.153)

During the Last Debate itself, imagery of water pervades the speech of the lords: 'Then you would have us retreat to Minas Tirith, or Dol Amroth, or to Dunharrow, and there sit like children on sand-castles when the tide is flowing?' said Imrahil.' (*RK* p.154) 'At length Aragorn spoke. 'As I have begun, so I will go on. We come now to the very brink, where hope and despair are akin.' (*RK* p.156) Metaphorically the planned assault on the Black Gate of Mordor begins at the brink of Anduin, as in the objective world Julius Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon stands as a metaphor for commitment. The crossing of Anduin is the first event of note in the description of the progress of the army: 'Some were strengthening the ferries and boat-bridges that the enemy had made and in part destroyed when they fled; some gathered stores and booty; and others on the eastern side across the River were throwing up hasty works of defence. The vanguard passed on through the ruins of Old Gondor, and over the wide River.' (*RK* p.160)

The only rivers in Mordor are rivers of flowing red lava, described in the same terms used by Tolkien to describe water. From the tower of Cirith Ungol Sam can see the 'burning mountain far away. A fresh turmoil was surging in its deep wells, and the rivers of fire blazed so fiercely that even at this distance of many miles the light of them lit the tower-top with a red glare.' (*RK* p.181) Lava is anti-water; its wells and springs may flow but signal only danger and death while water stands for salvation and life.

The first thing Sam does as he seeks to rescue Frodo is to bring into the courtyard of Cirith Ungol the water of Galadriel's well and the light of

Eärendil's star, breaking through the resistance of The Watchers by holding up the phial. The same light and water free them from the courtyard: 'Sam drew out the elven-glass of Galadriel again. As if to do honour to his hardihood, and to grace with splendour his faithful brown hobbit-hand that had done such deeds, the phial blazed forth suddenly, so that all the shadowy court was lit with a dazzling radiance like lightning; but it remained steady and did not pass.' (*RK* p.179)

Early in their arduous progress across Mordor, the absence of water and diminishing of their food supplies start to dominate the hobbits' thoughts: 'As I lay in prison, Sam. I tried to remember the Brandywine, and Woody End, and The Water running through the mill at Hobbiton. But I can't see them now.' [Sam said] 'If only the Lady could see us or hear us, I'd say to her: Your Ladyship, all we want is light and water: just clean water and plain daylight, better than any jewels, begging your pardon.' (*RK* p.195)

Help reaches them against all expectation: 'They had trudged for more than an hour when they heard a sound that brought them to a halt. Unbelievable, but unmistakable. Water trickling. Out of a gully on the left, so sharp and narrow that it looked as if the black cliff had been cloven by some huge axe, water came dripping down: the last remains, maybe, of some sweet rain gathered from sunlit seas, but ill-fated to fall at last upon the walls of the Black Land and wander fruitless down into the dust. Here it came out of the rock in a little falling streamlet, and flowed across the path, and turning south ran away swiftly to be lost among the dead stones. Sam sprang towards it. 'If ever I see the Lady again, I will tell her!' he cried. 'Light and now water!...The water was cool but not icy, and it had

an unpleasant taste, at once bitter and oily, or so they would have said at home. Here it seemed beyond all praise, and beyond fear or prudence. They drank their fill, and Sam replenished his water-bottle.' (*RK* pp.197-8)

After a night's rest, Sam and Frodo set out again on only 'a morsel of food and a sip of water.' (*RK* p.199) After their second night they find that 'A strong wind from the West was now driving the fumes of Mordor from the upper airs.' (*RK* p.205) They have no way at this point of guessing the significance of this wind, bringing the King from the sea and supporting their own struggle to destroy the power of Sauron. From this point on, Sam's only concern is to keep Frodo alive in the almost total absence of nourishment, and surrounded by danger; while Frodo's whole focus is on resisting the Ring's temptation. The next night '[Sam] gave Frodo water and an additional wafer of the waybread, and...made a pillow of his cloak for his master's head. [He] did not tell [Frodo] that he had drunk the last drop of their water, and eaten Sam's share of the food as well as his own.' Then 'Sam muttered to himself. 'I'll have to leave you for a bit and trust to luck. Water we must have, or we'll get no further.' Sam crept out, and flitting from stone to stone with more than hobbit-care, he went down to the water-course, and then followed it for some way as it climbed north, until he came to the rock-steps where long ago, no doubt, its spring had come gushing down in a little waterfall. To his delight he caught the sound of trickling. Clambering a few steps up he found a tiny stream of dark water that came out from the hill-side and filled a little bare pool, from which again it spilled, and vanished then under the barren stones. Sam

tasted the water, and it seemed good enough. Then he drank deeply, refilled the bottle, and turned to go back.' *RK* p. 206)

Now the pattern of the journey is set; in a reversal of the recorded presence of water in most of the tale to date, the absence of water dominates.

'Water, water!' muttered Sam. He had stinted himself, and in his parched mouth his tongue seemed thick and swollen; but for all his care they now had very little left, perhaps half his bottle, and maybe there were still days to go. All would long ago have been spent, if they had not dared to follow the orc-road. For at long intervals on that highway cisterns had been built for the use of troops sent in haste through the waterless regions. In one Sam had found some water left, stale, muddied by the orcs, but still sufficient for their desperate case. Yet that was now a day ago. There was no hope of any more. (*RK* p.213)

After Sam casts away all the heavy gear that is now merely burdensome, he learns from Frodo how the trial they are enduring has affected his master: 'No taste of food, no feel of water, no sound of wind, no memory of tree or grass or flower, no image of moon or star are left to me.' Sauron's domain is despoiled and the two hobbits cut off from all the natural elements of their lives. (*RK* p.215)

At their last halt before the final stage of the journey to Mount Doom, '[Frodo] sank down and said, 'I'm thirsty, Sam'...Sam gave him a mouthful of water; only one more mouthful remained.' Sam, sleepless, thinks: "He won't go another day like that, if he moves at all. And you can't go on much longer giving him all the water and most of the food." 'I can go on a good way though, and I will.'" (*RK* p.216)

As the strands of the story rejoin towards the climactic point of the Ring's destruction, water imagery continues to flow through the narrative: 'The Captains of the West were foundering in a gathering sea...The onslaught of Mordor broke like a wave on the beleaguered hills, voices roaring like a tide amid the wreck and crash of arms.' (*RK* p.226) Meanwhile within Mordor as Sam and Frodo sit hand in hand in exhaustion: 'a huge fiery vomit rolled in slow thunderous cascade down the eastern mountain-side...Slow rivers of fire came down the long slopes towards them. Soon they would be engulfed. A rain of hot ash was falling...two small dark figures, forlorn, hand in hand upon a little hill, while the world shook under them, and gasped, and rivers of fire drew near.' (*RK* pp.228-229)

After the fall of Sauron water references change: 'Gandalf... laughed and the sound was like music, or like water in a parched land...[Sam] burst into tears. Then, as a sweet rain will pass down a wind of spring and the sun will shine out the clearer, his tears ceased, and his laughter welled up.' (*RK* p.230) As the Ringbearers approach the waiting host they hear water nearby: 'Behind them they could hear the sound of falling water, and a stream ran down before them between flowering banks, until it came to a greenwood at the lawn's foot and passed then on under an archway of trees, through which they saw the shimmer of water far away. They went on through the aisle of trees beside the singing stream. So they came to a wide green land, and beyond it was a broad river in a silver haze, out of which rose a long wooded isle, and many ships lay by its

shores.' (*RK* p.231) Again come tears but not of sorrow: 'Sam...stood up and cried: 'O great glory and splendour! And all my wishes have come true!' And then he wept. And all the host laughed and wept, and in the midst of their merriment and tears the clear voice of the minstrel rose like silver and gold, and all men were hushed. And he sang to them ...until their hearts, wounded with sweet words, overflowed, and their joy was like swords, and they passed in thought out to regions where pain and delight flow together and tears are the very wine of blessedness. (*RK* p.232)

The combined effect of the music and the tears, the blending of joy and sorrow, carry them beyond the great sea, out of Middle-earth altogether; presaging the end of the tale at the Grey Havens. One member of the Fellowship has already foreseen the future:

'The wind is blowing, and the white foam is flying.  
West, west away, the round sun is falling.  
Grey ship, grey ship, do you hear them calling.  
The voices of my people that have gone before me?  
I will leave, I will leave the woods that bore me;  
For our days are ending and our years failing.  
I will pass the wide waters lonely sailing.  
Long are the waves on the Last Shore falling,  
Sweet are the voices in the Lost Isle calling,  
In Eressëa, in Elvenhome that no man can discover,  
Where the leaves fall not: land of my people for ever!'

And so singing Legolas went away down the hill.' (*RK* pp.234-235)

The presence and sound of water continue to nurture and heal the company as they rest in Ithilien: 'For the Field of Cormallen, where the host was now encamped was near to Henneth Annûn, and the stream that flowed from its falls could be heard in the night as it rushed down through

its rocky gate, and passed through the flowery meads into the tides of Anduin by the Isle of Cair Andros.' When the time comes for the King's return at the journey is taken by water. (RK p.235)

Meanwhile those remaining in Minas Tirith have suffered great anxiety since the armies rode away to the east. When the dark cloud arises from Mount Doom, it is visible from the city and Faramir cannot have been the only one to wonder whether it portends good or evil.

'It reminds me of Númenor,' said Faramir, and wondered to hear himself speak. 'Of Númenor?' said Éowyn. 'Yes,' said Faramir, 'of the land of Westernesse that foundered and of the great dark wave climbing over the green lands and above the hills, and coming on, darkness unescapable. I often dream of it.' (RK p.240)

'And the Shadow departed, and the Sun was unveiled, and light leaped forth; and the waters of Anduin shone like silver.' (RK p.241)

The coronation of Aragorn is imbued with the history of Middle-earth, the Great Sea and the ages past:

'Faramir opened the casket, and he held up an ancient crown. It was shaped like the helms of the Guards of the Citadel, save that it was loftier, and it was all white, and the wings at either side were wrought of pearl and silver in the likeness of the wings of a sea-bird, for it was the emblem of kings who came over the Sea; and seven gems of adamant were set in the circlet, and upon its summit was set a single jewel the light of which went up like a flame. Then Aragorn took the crown and held it up and said: *Et Eärello Endoreнна utúlien. Sinome maruvan ar Hildinyar tenn' Ambar-metta!* And those were the words that Elendil spoke when he came up out of the Sea on the wings of the wind: 'Out of the Great Sea to Middle-earth I am come. In this place will I abide, and my heirs, unto the ending of the world.'<sup>13</sup> (RK pp245-246)

When Aragorn climbs with Gandalf up the high path on Mt. Mindolluin, they survey the realm of the restored Kingship. Water bounds and defines

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<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Barootes notes with reference to this declaration: 'Language is the ultimate inspiration of Tolkien's tales [and] the means by which Aragorn, the returning king, restores the fallen world. [His] words carry the weight of a whole mythology.'



the kingdom Aragorn has reclaimed: 'Upon the one side their sight reached to the grey Emyrn Muil, and the glint of Rauros was like a star twinkling far off; and upon the other side they saw the River like a ribbon laid down to Pelargir, and beyond that was a light on the hem of the sky that spoke of the Sea.' (RK p.249) Close by they find the sapling, scion of Nimloth: 'Aragorn bore it back to the Citadel... [and] planted the new tree in the court by the fountain, and swiftly and gladly it began to grow.' (RK p.250)

It is beside the fountain that Frodo speaks with Aragorn and Queen Arwen, who 'said: 'A gift I will give you. For I am the daughter of Elrond. I shall not go with him now when he departs to the Havens; for mine is the choice of Lúthien, and as she so have I chosen, both the sweet and the bitter. But in my stead you shall go, Ring-bearer, when the time comes, and if you then desire it. If your hurts grieve you still and the memory of your burden is heavy, then you may pass into the West, until all your wounds and weariness are healed.' (RK p.252)

The journeys home from Gondor lead all the travellers beside and across many waters; firstly at the site of the Ents' remaking of Isengard into the Treegarth of Orthanc: 'the land...was made into a garden filled with orchards and trees, and a stream ran through it; but in the midst of all there was a lake of clear water, and out of it the Tower of Orthanc rose still, tall and impregnable, and its black rock was mirrored in the pool.' (RK p.256)

After their later encounter with Saruman: 'they rode at ease until they reached the Swanfleet river, and found the old ford, east of the falls where it went down suddenly into the lowlands. Far to the west in a haze lay the meres and eyots through which it wound its way to the Greyflood: there countless swans housed in a land of reeds.' (*RK* p.263)

After the elven folk turn east to Lórien, Gandalf and the hobbits make their way back to Rivendell, crossing once more its elegant bridge over the Bruinen. During their stay Sam remarks to Frodo that there is 'something of everything' in Rivendell, and Frodo answers 'Except the Sea.' (*RK* p.265)

On the return journey from Imladris to The Shire are two significant waters are recrossed: 'When they came to the Ford of Bruinen, [Frodo] halted, and seemed loth to ride into the stream; and they noted that for a while his eyes appeared not to see them or things about him.' (*RK* p.268)

The four hobbits are eager to return over the Brandywine Bridge to their long-missed homeland. But: 'when, wet and tired, the travellers came at last to the Brandywine...they found the way barred. At either end of the Bridge there was a great spiked gate.' (*RK* p.277) At last: 'they came to Bywater by its wide pool, and there they had their first really painful shock...The pleasant row of old hobbit-holes in the bank on the north side of the Pool were deserted, and their little gardens that used to run down bright to the water's edge were rank with weeds. Worse, there was a whole

line of the ugly new houses all along Pool Side, where the Hobbiton Road ran close to the bank. An avenue of trees had stood there. They were all gone.' (*RK* p.283) Farmer Cotton informs Frodo that: 'they pour out filth a purpose; they've fouled all the lower Water and it's getting down into Brandywine. If they want to make the Shire into a desert, they're going the right way about it.' In The Shire, as throughout the tale the despoiling of water is a sign of evil. (*RK* p.293)

When the time comes for the true ending of the Quest of the Ring 'they rode down at last to Mithlond, to the Grey Havens in the long firth of Lune...Then Círdan led them to the Havens, and there was a white ship lying, and upon the quay beside a great grey horse stood a figure robed all in white awaiting them.' Gandalf says: 'Well, here at last, dear friends, on the shores of the Sea comes the end of our fellowship in Middle-earth. Go in peace! I will not say: do not weep; for not all tears are an evil.' (*RK* 310)

Then Frodo kissed Merry and Pippin, and last of all Sam, and went aboard; and the sails were drawn up, and the wind blew, and slowly the ship slipped away down the long grey firth; and the light of the glass of Galadriel that Frodo bore glimmered and was lost. And the ship went out into the High Sea and passed on into the West...Sam...still stood far into the night, hearing only the sigh and murmur of the waves on the shores of Middle-earth, and the sound of them sank deep into his heart. (*RK* pp310-311)

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